

The ABCs of Bullying: Addressing, Blocking, and Curbing School Aggression

Fact Sheet: Prevention and Intervention—Parents

What Parents Can Do

Parents are an essential element in the school's effort to create a safe and orderly learning environment.

Parents can do the following:

- Set standards of behavior, limits, and clear expectations for your child, in and out of school.
- Provide a secure attachment for your child. Make sure they know you support them and are there for them.
- Be as positive as possible with your child. The goal for parents is to provide five positive comments for every negative one directed at a child.
- Monitor your own behavior and aggression. Demonstrate behavior at home between adults that is not bullying or aggressive. Children copy parents' behaviors—good and bad.
- Provide appropriate models of conflict resolution.
- Exhibit empathetic behavior (behavior that shows you trying to understand how the other person feels).
- Offer suggestions/advice for dealing with problematic peers.
- Encourage children who are bystanders to bullying to act appropriately.
- Be concerned and responsive regardless of whether your child is the reported bully or the victim. Offer support, but do not encourage dependence.
- Become involved in your child's school life by reviewing homework, meeting teachers, reading with your child, and attending school functions.
- Build a network of other adults, parents, and students to discuss school safety and other issues.
- Give your child the social skills they need to navigate through their own school experience.
- Teach your child to have respect for differences.
- Explain the difference between an assertive (self-confident, firm) and an aggressive (violent, belligerent, hostile) response.
- Be an advocate for bullying prevention in scout groups, athletic programs, and other youth activities.
- Share stories about your own childhood experiences with bullying.

For the Child Being Bullied

The behavior of parents will differ depending on whether their child is being bullied or is bullying. Children who are bullied tend to be scared and fragile and should never be blamed for the incident. All children deserve to be treated with respect and courtesy. If a child has been a victim of a bully, parents should follow these guidelines:

- Find out in detail what happened. Listen to the child and do not interrupt until he or she is finished.
- Contact the child's teacher, school counselor, and school administrator to alert them to the incident and ask for their cooperation.
- Avoid blaming anyone, especially the victim.
- Do not encourage the child to be aggressive or strike back.
- Discuss assertive alternatives to responding to bullies and role-play responses with the child (see Prevention and Intervention—Students fact sheet).
- Be prepared to contact an attorney if the bullying continues and the school does not take appropriate action for the child.
- Encourage the school to work collaboratively with you and others to take the bullying seriously and investigate the facts.
- Keep a log book (with the child if possible) describing the incidents of harassment or bullying, when they occurred, who took part, and what was said and done. This can strengthen a parent's case when contacting the school principal and/or teachers.

- Be patient. It often takes time for someone to change negative behaviors and interactions.

For the Child Who Bullies

Parents of children who bully must work closely with the school to resolve the situation. While it is difficult for most parents to hear something negative about their child's behavior, it is very important in a bullying situation for the parents to act immediately. Children who are aggressive towards their peers are at high risk for other antisocial behaviors such as criminality and misuse of alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs.

Steps parents can take include the following actions:

- Find out in detail why your child is bullying.
- Listen. It is difficult to listen to criticism of your child, but remember, the child's well-being is at stake.
- Spend more quality time getting to know your child's friends and what he or she does with them. Children need to feel that their parents listen to them.
- Do not blame others for your child's behavior.
- Point out that bullying behavior is *not* acceptable in the family.
- Try to model appropriate methods for handling issues of power or the inequality of power.
- Specify the consequences if the bullying persists.
- Teach and role-play appropriate behavior.
- Follow up with the teacher and administration and track improvements.
- Try to channel the aggressive behavior toward something positive, such as sports, where teammates need to play by the rules. Explore other talents the child may have and help him or her develop them.

References

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